

trayal Greer Faraday suffers is somewhat predictable, this is only the setup for her real story. As Greer marches headlong to her inevitable betrayal, she almost resembles one of Robert Stone's Icarus-like doomed protagonists (and indeed Stone is first among the teachers whom Vanderbes thanks at the end of the novel), but it is really her husband, the betrayer who ultimately destroys himself, who would best fit in one of Stone's novels, and this story follows Greer, one American whose life really does have a second act. It is on Easter Island that Greer comes back to life, and into her true self for the first time. This is a property of the island that more than one real life visitor has experienced, and it is this aspect of the island, its most subtle and elusive, that Vanderbes brings across so well.

Vanderbes combines all the threads of her story seamlessly, in such a way that they enhance rather than distract from each other. In another writer's hands, such a complex narrative structure might become pretentious, but Vanderbes simply tells a good story and tells it well. Her prose is as accomplished as her narrative skills, highly refined but at the same time, immensely satisfying.

A particular quality of her prose is her ability to bring her settings to life as vividly as her characters. On almost every page a scene springs vividly to life: a British sitting room, a stretch of dirt road on the island, the stateroom of a warship, an empty concrete science lab. With a few deft flourishes, Vanderbes paints and then animates one vibrant still life after another, as in this example: "Greer sat and pulled out the lunch Mahina had packed--two bananas, a cheese sandwich, and a warm bottle of cola. In the distance, a small jetty stretched into the water, frayed ropes hanging from its rocks. Beneath her, the sea splashed the cliff, and she listened, with surprising contentment, to the rhythm of the waves." *Easter Island* is filled with passages like this, spare, economical, yet fully realized and alive.

One other nice touch is the way Vanderbes handles the science in her novel so poetically. There have always been excellent writers who have been able to do justice to scientific material in various non-fiction genres (Darwin for instance, whose prose Vanderbes showcases so nicely), but it is rare to see someone achieve that feat in a novel or poem. As the lives of her two main characters are so intimately involved in scientific endeavor, the author's ability to convey the vitality of their subject matter allows the reader to identify with them all the more deeply. Especially effective is the way she punctuates Greer's internal monologue with the scientific names of plants, which instead of becoming awkward, adds an additional precision to the portrayal of both setting and character.

Easter Island displays a level of craftsmanship not often seen in a first novel. Vanderbes' crystalline prose, the originality of her characters, and her considerable ability as a storyteller are impressive. The few minor criticisms that I might make are purely pedantic: a reference to a clay pot and a salamander found in caves (no ceramics have ever been found on the island in an archaeological context, nor has any zoologist ever listed any amphibians among the island's fauna, living or extinct), an anachronistic reference to Elsa trying to decide if the Rongorongo script is "logographic, syllabic, or alphabetic" (this set of terms did not achieve currency until 1952, when Ignace J. Gelb proposed them in his seminal *A Study of Writing*), the poor quality of the reproduction of a line of Rongorongo script on

page 149 (it's noticeably bitmapped, most likely the publisher's fault), but none of these are points that will concern the general reader. Given the spurious and downright sloppy nature of much that so-called scholars have published about Easter Island, even the staunchest Rapanuiphile can hardly deny Vanderbes a little license, especially when she captures what does matter so well. We need not turn to her for fact, though her novel is certainly well-researched, and other than what she has deliberately altered to create her narrative and the admittedly trivial points above, she provides an excellent introduction to the island for those who have not already been through the standard sources several times over. Those who have will certainly forgive Vanderbes for what she has turned to the service of her craft, given that she uses that craft to present the true spirit of the island, something that has rarely been done so well, if at all.

Easter Island is a boon not only to those who know and love Rapa Nui, but to all who enjoy good story telling and fine prose.

EIF NEWS

THE PREZ SEZ

SCHOLARSHIP AWARDS for Rapanui students who desire to study at a college or university abroad are provided each year by the EIF, through donations. This year we are pleased to offer two scholarships for Rapanui students: one is the Nicolas Haoa Sr. Memorial Scholarship (US \$2000 for one student for one year) and the other is the Wiegand Foundation award. The Wiegand Foundation award is a scholarship for a Rapanui student of US \$2000 per year for four years. We are extremely happy to announce these awards and we are grateful that we can offer these opportunities to Rapanui students. We sincerely thank our donors and the Wiegand Foundation. We look forward to more great sponsors to step forward and help Rapanui students to toward a brighter future. Our next issue of RNJ will have the winners of these scholarships.

Christopher M. Stevenson

GREETINGS FROM OUR BAYWOOD OFFICE! Aside from our current publications, we have other new items for sale including mousepads showing a *moai* at sunset at Tahai. They are priced at \$10 and make great gifts. We also have EIF t-shirts with a drawing of a *moai* from Rano Raraku. They are available in gray with a burgundy *moai* or sage green with a dark green *moai*. These come in M, L, or XL and sell for \$20. Your purchase helps the EIF raise money for projects benefiting the island and islanders. We also have some interesting used books for sale, donated by members. Contact us at 805-528-8558 (M-F, 9-12 PST), email us at rapanuibooks@att.net or check our web site (www.islandheritage.org) for details. We still have EIF mugs with the award-winning logo (designed by Mark Oliver) available, as well as a variety of posters and note cards.

In the woodcarving department, we have 2 *rongorongo* boards available, a *moko* (lizard) and a *paroko* (fish man). We also have a few carvings by Bene Aukara Tuki: a *paoa*, a *rei miro* with chicken heads, and a stunning androgynous figure. These pieces are beautifully carved and come with a booklet about the artist.

We are running very low on some out-of-print publications. These include *Easter Island. The Heritage and its Conservation* by Elena Charola, *Rock Art of Easter Island* by Georgia Lee and *Easter Island Studies* by Steven Roger Fischer. If you have thought about buying any of these books in the past, the time to purchase them is now!

The EIF has a new membership program! One-year memberships include a year's subscription to the *Rapa Nui Journal*. The cost is \$40 for U.S./Canada and \$50 for all other countries. The price includes an interim email newsletter. Please make sure we have your current email address when you renew so that you can keep posted on all the island news. We also will provide a 10% discount on EIF purchases to any member who refers someone to us, resulting in a new membership, so please tell all your friends about us!

Some of our readers' memberships have lapsed. Your timely membership renewal will help to save us time and money. To see when your membership expires, check the date on your *Rapa Nui Journal* mailing label.

Student and library/institutional memberships remain at \$30 (U.S./Canada) and \$40 (other countries). We have several libraries that would like to receive *RNJ* but have limited budgets. If you would like to sponsor a library subscription, please contact us for a list of libraries and details. We appreciate your help!

We thank everyone who has kept their membership current and especially those who have given us additional donations throughout the year. People like you help us to fulfill our goal of educating the public about Easter Island and help us to carry out special projects that benefit the island and its people.

MOAI SIGHTINGS

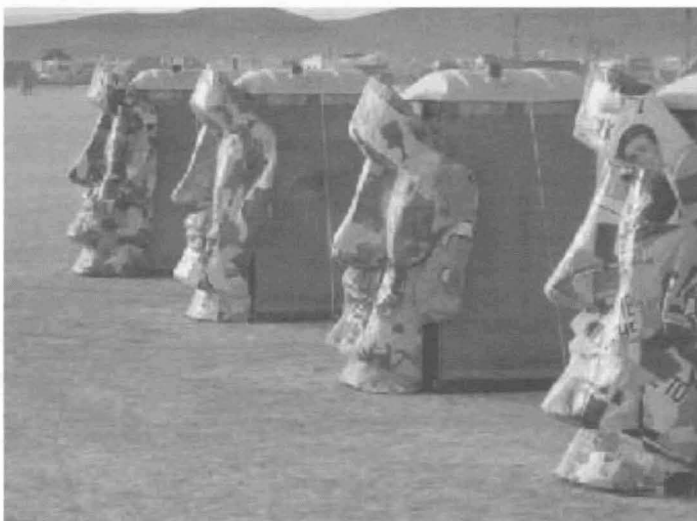
BURNING MOAI: DRAGON DEBRIS'S EASTER ISLAND VILLAGE AND THE HEADS PROJECT AT BURNING MAN, 2002

by Scott Nicolay

IN AUGUST OF 2002, Luling Osofsky had just returned from five weeks of archaeological field school on Rapa Nui, and she was getting ready to head for the second big event of a particularly amazing summer: the Burning Man festival in the Nevada desert. She knew she was going to see some strange and wonderful sights at Burning Man. What she didn't expect to see there were *moai*. And she especially didn't expect to see them attached to the portable toilets. "I loved the combo of old and new," said Osofsky, "Rano Raraku versus octopus-costumed techno pagans popping off their stilts before using the port-a-potties in the desert, after patting a *moai* on the nose."

This rather spectacular *moai* sighting was the work of Dragon Debris, an arts collective that has constructed elaborate art installations at Burning Man since 1999. In 2002, they chose Easter Island as the theme for their efforts. Burning Man itself, which may need explanation for some *RNJ* readers, is an unusual, by some standards outrageous, interactive art festival and celebration of pyromania and, well, lots of other things that don't always get celebrated in public elsewhere. The festival began in 1986 in San Francisco as a commemoration of the

summer solstice. Artist Larry Harvey constructed an eight foot tall effigy and burned it on a local beach. Only 20 people attended that first year, but as the event (and the burning man himself, now towering 80 feet above the desert floor) grew larger, Harvey and his friends were forced to relocate to Nevada's Black Rock Desert. Now the population of Black Rock City (as the festival site is known) swells annually to more than 25,000, some of whom arrive in airplanes and helicopters. Theme camps and art installations are integral parts of the event. The Burning Man organization requires installations to be interactive, and the festival emphasizes participation over spectatorship. Each year the festival has one overall theme. Participants develop their own theme camps and installations that express their personal interpretations of the annual theme. Dragon Debris founder John Barry aptly describes the event as "the Internet come to life."



Burning Man port-a-potties (photo © Dale East).

Like the festival itself, Barry started small, developing elaborate personae to go with his Halloween costumes. When he became involved with Burning Man in 1999, his individual concepts expanded into group performance art pieces. The group's projects combine the ancient with the mechanical, and along with their playfulness and a taste for over-the-top puns, they also show a strong interest in exploring religious themes. So how did Dragon Debris come up with Easter Island as the concept for their theme camp in 2002? According to Barry, the original germ of inspiration came from a group that would stage an "Easter Saturday" each year at the festival, dressing up as "church ladies" and haranguing the sinners (who are both plentiful and highly visible at the event). This got him thinking about the concept of Easter itself. His interest in ancient cultures and the tentative festival theme of "Ports of Call" (eventually changed to "The Floating World," with which the idea fit equally well), led to the original Easter Island concept. It started out as a pastiche, an installation of giant candy sculptures that would emphasize the absurdity of Europeans imposing the whole concept of Easter, with its association with rebirth, on another culture even as they were destroying it. The crew also looked at the basic question of "Why does a bunny bring eggs?", something Barry says he once had